

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS –PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL SKILLS

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RESUMEN

Actualmente, muchas personas pueden ser maestros, pero la cuestión es si muchos de éstos son maestros eficaces. Es evidente que, ser un maestro eficaz es más complicado y difícil de lo que mucha gente piensa. Ser un maestro eficaz no se trata solamente de tener un conocimiento profundo de los contenidos, sino que también es necesario tener habilidades organizativas, de gestión, y de comunicación. Un maestro eficaz debe ser capaz de proporcionar tareas pertinentes y relevantes acompañadas de un sistema de evaluación justa. Adicionalmente, el maestro eficiente es responsable de crear un buen clima escolar o educativo, para fomentar el entusiasmo, la motivación y una relación interactiva entre profesor y alumno. Además, implica el preocuparse y ser sensible a las necesidades del alumno, y sobre todo incentivar el aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, este artículo presenta algunas de las principales cualidades necesarias para ser un maestro eficaz se centra en las competencias y habilidades profesionales y personales del maestro.

PALABRAS CLAVE: eficaz, habilidades de gestión y organización, la motivación, los cuidados y el respeto, y la conducta.

ABSTRACT

These days, many people can be a teacher, but the question is, if many people can be an effective teacher. Clearly, to be an effective teacher is more complicated and difficult than many people think. To be an effective teacher does not only involve having a deep content knowledge, but also organizational, management and communication skills, being able to organize instructions, and providing relevant assessment and fair evaluations. In addition, an effective teacher is responsible to create a warm classroom climate, to promote enthusiasm, motivation and an interactive teacher-student relationship. Also, it implies to be caring and understandable, and above all, to enhance learning. Therefore, this paper presents some of the main qualities needed to be an effective teacher focusing on the professional and personal skills.

KEYWORDS: effective, skills, management and organization, motivation, cares and respect, and behaviour.

1. Introduction

The idea of effective teacher for each individual is variable. Students' perception, opinions and/or experiences about an effective teacher are different. An effective teacher has been considered, sometimes, as a perfectionist, encouraging, approachable and caring, other times as intelligent, but above all, as enthusiastic, funny, clever, affective and understanding, open, and with a relaxed style while teaching. In 1964, Holt addressed that learning is enhanced by the teachers' knowledge, enthusiasm and responsibility towards creating a warm class climate enhancing "the students desire to learn and to accept the challenges of thinking and enquiring into all that is offered by the teacher". Stronge et al (2004) stated that teaching is vocational, and most effective teachers are passionate about their chosen profession. However, he also added that an effective teacher is always in a constant learning process due to changes in terms of the students' characteristics, the curriculum, the community, and finance among many others.

According to Gibbs (2002) "Teachers need to be able to survive the demands, threats and challenges within the diverse circumstances of teaching" He stated that an effective teacher needs the capacity to be persistent, flexible, and innovative on new teaching approaches and be prepared in the case of failure. For Stronge et al. (2004) the effective teacher has a psychological influence on the students, having a strong influence on their achievement. According to Killen (2006), the effective teacher is the one who has clear objectives and own goals of teaching. A teacher can provide the students with the answer of a question, which can be effective only if the main objective is simply to compare and analyse different results. However, if the objective is to make the student think about the option of providing different possible answers, the teacher, in this case, may be regarded as ineffective. Smith (1995) stated that teachers and teaching need to be creative to allow the students learn naturally. He also added that educational institutions should spend more time on "doing" and less time on "talking about learning and teaching" In addition, Gurney (2007) suggested that instead of reflecting on theory and practice, we should reflect on what we do in the classroom.

Effective teachers need to focus on students' achievement. Alton-Lee (2003) pointed out that an effective link between school and cultural context is needed; apart from being caring, and enhance assessment, feedback and evaluation, as well as being responsible to students learning process, the curriculum goals, the multiple tasks and the contexts. Gurney (2007) suggested that to be an effective teacher there should be an interaction among different factors. One of them is the teacher' knowledge, enthusiasm and responsibility for learning. Another factor is that effective teachers should provide the students with activities and assessment that encourages them to learn (and learn through experience), as well as having an engaged feedback. Finally, to create a warm environment and a relationship with the students in which respect will enhance learning. According to Borich (2000), the responsibilities of effective teachers are to have lesson clarity, instructional variety, teacher task orientation, engagement in the learning process and student success rate.

Therefore, effective teachers do not teach in front of the class doing a good demonstration on the extensive and deep content knowledge, they teach to promote and enhance learning. Besides, they knows how to manage, not only their knowledge, but also the classroom and the students in terms of discipline, work, interaction between teacher-

students-students, how to give instructions, and how to assess and evaluate activities, the students and their own work. Therefore, to be effective teachers also imply to have a series of qualities, in terms of professional and personal skills.

2. Effective Teacher -Professional Skills

Effective teachers are distinguished by their dedication to the students and to the job of teaching, and feel responsible for the achievement and success of the students and own professional development. Effective teachers really believe that all students can learn, although all learn differently. They strive to motivate and engage all their students in learning rather than simple accepting that some students cannot be engaged and are destined to do poorly.

There are many different types of teachers. For instance, among many others, there are those who walk into the classroom, and some students do not even notice them; also there are some who seem to be authentic dictators, and students are even afraid to ask anything in the classroom. There are those who read from a book, or talk constantly, during the whole session, while students keep just copying; or even those who just talk, and by the end of the lesson, students do not even know what the lesson was about, because the objectives, structure and/or theme were not clear, even for the teacher.

Content Knowledge

For many, including teachers, the most obvious requirement to be an effective teacher is the content knowledge of the subject. Reynolds and Muijs (1999) considered good content knowledge responses to spontaneous and demanding students questioning. According to the McBer Report (DFES, 2000) students expect a teacher to have good content knowledge to be considered effective, which inspire the students' confidence in the teacher. In addition, Ferguson & Womackl (1993) stated that "effective communication of content knowledge is a hallmark of good teachers". However, having good content knowledge is just one of many vital factors and qualities, which an effective teacher needs to have in order to enhance learning and achievement.

Good Planning

Having good content knowledge is not so effective without a well planned lesson. A lesson plan makes the content and the session interesting and involving. Good planning facilitates clear explanations, and it provides a wide range of resources suitable to students needs. It assists with effective use of oral questioning, giving instructions, being flexible, and having an impact on the students' stimulation to encourage their interest and participation. Effective teachers should give meaning to the subject by facilitating relevant material to the students wherever possible, and by finding means to stimulate interest on it. Besides, they must be prepared to reconsider whether the material and methodology is suitable to be re-presented in the classroom. Craig and Dickenson (2003) pointed out that good planning ensures that lessons include periods where students are allowed to have discussion in open or close groups or in pairs. Good planning organizes the material which allows doing more and better during a session. Gurney, (2007) also pointed out that should allow the students to give the teacher their feedback in order to improve own knowledge, methodology and learning environment if needed. Cruickshenk & Haefele (2001) stated that "effective teachers are able to qualitatively do more with the same amount of time" However, good planning also implies classroom management and organization to achieve learning.

Classroom Management and Organization

Effective teachers manage and organize the classroom, in the beginning of the year, according to the students' needs and preferences to create an optimistic and warm learning environment for all the students, and enhance learning. Emmer et al. (1980, 2003) stated that "effective teachers takes time in the beginning of the year and especially on the first day to school to establish classroom management, classroom organization and expectations for students behavior"

According to Sokal et al. (2003) classroom management seem to be a high priority for novice and experience teachers. However, management is not parallel to strict rules; in fact, management is to anticipate students' needs, and then prepare a suitable year plan, procedures, activities, assessment, evaluation criteria, and above all, clear instructions to the students to promote students motivation, enthusiasm and learning. Effective teachers use low classroom rules, and more routines to maintain a relaxed and warm environment to enhance learning. Marzano et al. (2003) stated that "minimum number of classroom rules, which tend to focus on expectations of how to act toward one another, maintain a safe environment, and participate in learning". McLeod et al. (2003) distinguished from rules, and stated that is more effective and efficient to use routines in the classroom. Stronge et al. (2003) also suggested that effective teachers use more routines for daily tasks than rules. Wong and Wong (2005) distinguished between routine as what the students do automatically, and procedure as what the teachers want to be done.

While classroom management focus on instructions which influences the students in terms of psychological behaviour to learn, classroom organization influences the students' motivation to learn created from the physical learning environment. Effective teachers organize the classroom to promote learning and interaction, and have to create an optimal learning environment where students feel comfortable and relax in terms of decoration, accessibility and mobility. According to Stronge et al, (2004) part of the classroom organization is the furniture arrangement, the accessibility of material, and the decoration. Kohn (1996) stated that the furniture arrangement facilitate interaction.

Classroom Behaviour

Good classroom management and organization, and a good lesson plan also minimises the likelihood of misbehaviour. Craig and Dickenson (2003) stated that almost all classroom behaviour is learned and that students must clearly understand what is expected of them. The responsibility lies with the teachers to explain how and why they want them to work in that way, and to give positive feedback when students respond positively. In the McBer Report (DFES, 2000), it is stated that students themselves want a teacher to keep discipline in the classroom. According to Kyriacou, (1998) maintaining discipline is necessary for learning to be effective. He also suggested that students' misbehaviour can be minimised by generally skilful teaching. Wong and Wong (2005) differentiate between manage and disciple. They stated that "effective teachers manage their classrooms with procedures and routines. Ineffective teachers discipline their classrooms with threats and punishments". They also underlined that discipline has to do with how students behave, and management has to do with procedures on how students have to work in the classroom. Many ineffective teachers use reward stickers, incentive gifts, infractions cards to discipline their classroom with punishments. They only waste time, and do not solve the problem, effective teachers manage the classroom with procedures and routines to maximise and engage learning time.

Misbehaviour such as lack of silence can occur. Some seemed to obtain virtual silence all the time. Others obtain almost perfect silence, but pupils need regular reminders, while others, seldom achieved any silence and pupils behaviour needed regularly keeping in check. Craig and Dickenson (2003) pointed out that it is unreasonable to expect total silence for extended periods. On the other hand, an effective teacher is aware that some students might prefer to sit quietly and have low active participation in the classroom activities, although will know how to make the student participate.

Individual Differences

Many teachers still teach their students in the same way they were taught. Some because they, erroneously, think that the traditional teaching is more effective, others because they just do not worry much about alter their own and bad routine by laziness, and other because they think that students have to adapt to the teacher own methods. Wickham (2003) warned that the teaching styles used by each teacher can be strongly influenced by their own learning style. Effective teachers should be able to personalize the leaning for their students. They understand that students develop as different rates and that in every classroom there will be a range of student abilities and aptitudes. The teacher must feel the pulse of a classroom and modify the teaching methods to maintain a high level of interest, no matter what the subject is. They also use their knowledge of learning processed to determine which will be most effective to help the particular students in their classes learning successfully. Effective teachers strike the right chord with the students and have a sixth sense about those who need more help. For these reasons, it is vital to know the students` needs, their learning strategies and style, personality, motivation, attitude, abilities, even background to be able to help them.

In addition, effective teachers use techniques that best serve the learning needs of their students. They use them to have each student working on tasks that engage and challenge them to achieve personal best. There are many things that students can learn themselves through discovery, and/or in a more direct way. Some students learn by being exposed to learning opportunities, while others will need concerted direct teaching and correction by the teacher before they master the learning requirements. Effective teachers help students learn on their own, as well as from others, from outside the school, and from various sources such technology, (Lowman, 1995) Effective teachers must be prepared to reconsider whether the material and methodology is suitable to be re-presented in the classroom. In addition, effective teachers understand that students learn best if their particular culture, background and abilities are acknowledged by the teacher and the methodology and procedure can be adapted to the students´ needs, (Zeichner, 1993).

Communication Skills

Communication skills are vital for anyone who has a teaching job. Effective teachers are always effective communicators. They communicate clearly about course objectives, content and testing, making sure to provide a rationale for learning particular material and adapt instruction to their student's level of knowledge and skill. Lacks of communication mean that the students will not understand key concepts at all, or they will do incorrectly. Effective teacher can take something that is complex and present it in a way that can be easily absorbed by the students, and through different verbal and non-verbal communications (Prozesky, 2000).

The Teachers´ Confidence

Teachers' confidence plays an important role in effectiveness. Confidence to teach subject matter influences the teaching outcomes (Bandura, 1997). If effective teachers believe in themselves, they achieve a lot in the classroom, and students know who is in charge, and the teacher knows what material to cover, and how to teach it.

Effective teachers are passionate about teaching and the subject. If the teachers do not love their job, the students perceive it, influencing in their low motivation. Besides, if they do not love the subject, therefore, how can the students be going to love it? Effective teachers have an energy that almost makes them glow and they tackle each lesson with a sense of challenge, rather than routine. Wolk (2001) stated that when the teacher is passionate about learning can create an "infectious classroom environment" Besides, Gurney (2007) pointed out that when the teachers show enthusiasm, and there is interaction in the classroom, the work of learning process is turned into a pleasure. In addition, teachers who are enthusiastic about their subjects and learning, motivate students, and therefore increase achievement (Stronge et al., 2004).

Motivation for Learning

Motivating students make them to be more receptive and excited about the subject, make them be aware of the value and importance of learning, and have a better attitude to learn. Effective teachers makes the students increase their academic self-concept, their interest in the subject and the desire to learn more, and therefore to have a high level of achievement (NWREL, 2001). It also been stated that students see the effective teacher as a motivational and a leader when the teacher encourages them to be responsible for their own learning. Also when high standards and challenge tasks and a variety of strategies such as cooperative learning (Fisher, 2003); and when relevant reinforcement and feedback have been provided during the process, enhancing learning as a result. Humour can be a powerful ingredient in every lesson. Effective teachers do not need to be clowns, but it is beneficial to have good sense of humour, and been willing to share jokes with the students to break negative-cold barriers.

Respect, Fairness and Equity

Respect, fairness and equity are identified as the prerequisite of effective teaching in the eyes of students. Kyriacou, (1998) stated mutual respect as an essential feature of the classroom to establish the right climate for effective teaching and learning. He also added that respect requires the students to know that the teacher is competent, interested in their progress and is committed. Effective teachers should avoid situations of lack of respect among students who do not respect their peers. Fairness is so appreciated by the students, and effective teachers respond individually to misbehaviour, rather than to the whole class, (Stronge et al. 2004). He added that students expect to be treated equitably in any situation, either in case of misbehaviour, assessment results, religion, ethnic background, age, etc. and to avoid favouritism (Peart & Campbell, 1999). Therefore, effective teacher continually demonstrate respect to their students (inside or outside the classroom), fairness and equity regarding individual situations, age, background, ethnicity, religion, economical status, and so forth).

Assessment and evaluation

Effective teachers really believe every student is capable of achieving success, and they do all they can to find ways of making each student successful. Effective teachers' expectations towards the students, in terms of standard of learning and their behaviour,

are high, and they help their students to meet those high expectations which are essential. According to Graham et al. (2001), a good way to communicate high expectations is through challenging tasks, case-base approach involving real-world problems, sample cases, and praise.

Assessment can be an effective learning process. Effective teachers have good expertise in a variety of assessment methods, equitable practice, and a good and fair evaluation system. They teach to encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning. They also make sure that their students know what the objectives and goals of the learning program are; understand how these goals will be assessed; know whether they are on the pathway to achieve success; and are actively involve in evaluating their own leaning. Effective teachers request formal and informal responses from students during the semester, and use the information to improve their courses as they are being taught. According to Cameron (2002), students should be able to understand that assessment is a part of their learning process and not just one activity to fill the subject. This benefits students from learning environments which help peer tutoring, co-operative learning and questioning, summarising and collaborative reasoning. Graham et al. (2001) highlighted that if students are allowed to choose their own project topics relevant to the course, they are encourage to express their own diverse points of view. In the Six Traits of Writing Report (2010), it is stated that when students write about something they like, they do it better. According to Graham et al. (2001), well designed discussion assignments facilitate meaningful cooperation among students. He also stated that effective teachers also give positive feedback regularly through the course to inform the students about the learning process. He distinguishes between information feedback (grades or comments), and acknowledgment feedback (confirmation of reception of assessment), and added that deadlines encourage students to spend time on tasks and help with busy schedules. Besides, evaluation techniques should be clearly related to course objectives, and have to provide a fair and objective evaluation of learning.

Teacher Learning Development

Effective teachers have high expectations of students in terms of both their standard of learning and their behaviour, but they also have high expectations of themselves and their own learning development. Effective teachers constantly self-evaluate, critique and reflect on how well they are getting through to their students, and search for better ways of teaching, new tools, materials and methodologies especially for those who are not achieving learning as well as others. In order to achieve some of these skills, many British institutions of higher education require attendance at a short introductory course on university teaching and learning, but in many systems voluntary participation is the norm. Effective teachers are willing to promote their own learning by investing on training and/or inviting observation and suggestions from colleagues. Collings (1994) stated that a teacher should be in constant training-learning process, and have capacity to reflect upon own practice. Stronge et al. (2004) stated that staff development is vital to effective implementation, and can help teachers to learn new strategies to be applied. They also work collaboratively with other staff members, are willing to share their ideas, and assist other teachers with difficulties and volunteer to lead work teams and to be mentors to new teachers, (NETI, 2009). They are informal leaders who are not afraid of taking risk to innovate or improve education. Therefore, effective teachers participate in creating a collaborative environment of a positive working relationship.

3. Effective Teacher -Personal Skill

Together with professional skills, effective teachers use their personal skills with the students as these skills play an important role in students learning process, achievement, and behaviour.

Caring

Effective teachers care about their students in order to bring the best of each one to encourage learning. According to Gurney (2007), learning has been considered as an emotional exercise which will allow the students to get engaged as it appeals to be emotionally. Besides, Eisner (2002) suggests that “teaching is a caring exercise” which takes an important role in effective learning process. Showing care includes listening to the students, not only when they are in the classroom, but also about their particular lives and/or personal problems. The role of the effective teachers, in this situation, is to be good listeners, paying attention to, and showing understanding through tenderness and patience. According to Stronge et al. (2004) students perceive effectiveness when teachers show kindness, gentleness and encouragement. Effective teachers demonstrate genuine concern and empathy toward students through understanding the students’ concerns and questions. Stronge et al. (2004) stated that effective teachers listen to the students’ arguments and help and/or indicates them how to resolve their problems, and are willing to talk about their personal lives and experiences respecting the confidentiality issues. Therefore, there is a more effective achievement when the teacher demonstrates that cares about the students and knows them individually.

Knowing the Students Individually

Effective caring teachers also know the students individually and give them individual attention and develop productive relationships with their students. They treat their student with respect and expect the same in return, enhancing the students learning progress. It is not enough to know the students in their formal setting (in the classroom: their learning strategies or learning style), but also, to know them in their informal setting (outside the classroom: likes and dislikes, background, their motivation, aptitude and attitude to learn). These have great effect on behaviour and performance in the classroom, and in their learning process (Cruickshank & Haefele, 2001). In addition, according to Stronger et al. (2004) caring goes beyond listening, understanding and knowing the students, it is also being patient, kind, warm, sensitive, human with them. It is to be adaptable to particular students’ situations, honest, trustworthy, encouraged, and having and showing affection and love for them. Sizer (1999) stated that students cannot be taught well if we do not know them.

Teacher-Students Relationship

Effective teachers do not only have a teacher-student relationship in the classroom, but also demonstrate interest in students’ lives beyond the classroom, using a wide variety of strategies to interact with them outside the class, and the educational institution. This also encourages students to perform their best in the classroom (Kohn, 1996). The election on the type of social event can be easier if the teacher knows the students preferences. Students really appreciate the teacher who attends social event with them, such as the graduation, the end course dinner, a visit to a museum, a local event, a

concert, etc. According to Stronge et al. (2004) the social interactions between the teacher and students encourage students leaning and achievement. Besides, this helps introvert or low self-esteem learners to be better integrated in the group. This increases students' participation and motivation, which enhance a more favourable leaning environment, and challenge the students to succeed. Wolk, (2002) stated that a strong relationships with the students helps to decrease discipline problems. Therefore, a teacher who spends more time interacting socially with the students, working directly with them, and demonstrates a sense of fun and willingness to participate, in a friendly and personal manner, is considered to be effective. Knowing the students and having a teaching-student relationship with them creates a warm classroom and learning environment.

Classroom Environment

Wang et al. (1997) found classroom climate to be one of the most important factors to affect students' achievement, although, on the contrary, it has been a strong predictor of students' aggression. However, having an optimal relationship with the students helps to create a warm and safe classroom environment so that students can achieve their potential, as they feel safe and confident to attempt new tasks and participate (Reynolds and Muijs, 1999)

4. Conclusion

To conclude, to be an effective teacher is not an easy task. In fact, it is a complex process. It is not only concerned with success in short-term, but also with appropriate values and success of long term achievement. Effective teachers need to have good professional and personal skills. Content knowledge, together with good planning, clear goals and communication, good classroom management and organization, and consistently high and realistic expectations with the students are essential factors to be effective teachers. Besides, they need to feel responsible for the students learning process, regardless the students' aptitude to learn. The teachers, as well as having effective personal and professional skills, serve as example of lifelong learners, and are investors of their own education.

Moreover, the effective teacher will combine professionalism with care, understanding, fairness, and kindness. They also have to be passionate, enthusiastic, motivated about teaching and learning. They have to create a warm classroom environment where students feel comfortable, and have a sense of belonging, as the environment is conducive to learn. Effective teachers are innovative, invite students to approach and interactions, and also values diversity. To finalise, it can be said that those who have the capacity to inspire students to reach their fullest potential on learning through their qualities and professional and personal skills are effective teachers.

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